

Introduction

Connecting

Stress and the Heart

Scientists are discovering that certain emotions, like grief, anger, sadness, and loneliness can actually do as much, or more damage to your heart than high blood pressure or high cholesterol.

Until recently, most people thought the brain told the body what to do. But a new branch of medicine called **psycho-neuro-immunology** is proving that the mind and the body – especially the heart, communicate with one another.

The Heart Speaks (Are You Listening?) by Mimi Guarneri, MD

Dr. Guarneri, is founder and medical director of Scripps Center for Integrative Medicine in LaJolla, CA. Dr. Guarneri explains, “If you’re in an **angry, frustrated state**, your body is producing **stress hormones that are creating a chaotic heart rhythm. There’s an outpouring of adrenaline and cortisol that increases heart rate, blood pressure, and make platelets stickier, all of which can cause a heart attack.”**

“While we may believe the brain is our decision maker and ruler, the 10 ounce heart is more powerful than we ever imagined – functioning as a sensory organ, hormone-producing gland, and information-processing center”.

Several recent studies have put the link between mind and heart into sharp focus. Researchers at

the University of North Carolina measured the anger levels of nearly 13,000 men and women and then tracked them for six years. As was reported in the May 2000 issue of *The Lancet*, the people who were most prone to anger were nearly three times as likely as the cool-headed subjects to have a heart attack in those six years.

Depression may take an even greater toll. A 23 year study of 2,500 people conducted at Johns Hopkins University found that an episode of depression increased the risk of a heart attack more than fourfold. Even if a person survives the initial attack, depression can be deadly. Researchers at the Montreal Heart Institute tracked 222 heart attack survivors and found that those suffering from depression were roughly six times as likely as others to die within six months of their attack.

Even if you are depressed and rarely blow your top, the everyday strains of life can harm the heart. A 14 -year study of 3,575 workers in the United States published in 1997 found that people who felt little control over their jobs were 40 percent more likely to suffer a heart attack.

Nobody can expect to be calm 24 hours a day. But if anger, depression, or other negative feelings consume your life, you need to take action. In this class we discuss ways to help ease your mind and protect your heart.

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